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Norman R. Ball

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Made in Saskatchewan: A Story of Invention. Saskatchewan Western Development Museums. North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Western Development Museums, May, 1980. Pp. 48, illus.

Made in Saskatchewan: A Story of Invention is the catalogue of an exhibition by the same name which was mounted by the Saskatchewan Western Development Museum in 1980 during the province's 75th anniversary, 'an exhibition in praise and celebration of the ingenuity of the people who have occupied this prairie land since 1905.' (p. 3)

The catalogue lists all, and illustrates some of the 208 items in the exhibit. The museum appears to have presented a varied, evenly-balanced and well-conceived reflection of 75 years of ingenuity and creative activity in a clearly-defined geographical area. Many of the artifacts were loaned by private owners and one hopes that before being returned, they were properly photographed and documented for further research. The exhibit is over, but the catalogue still merits study.

The brief account of the origins of the exhibit provides an illuminating look at an all-too-frequently held misconception about inventiveness in Canada: there was not much. When planning and research started, it was assumed that there would have been about 300 patents of invention issued to residents of Saskatchewan between 1905 and 1980. The

researchers found more than ten times the expected number. They also uncovered a number of commercially-produced unpatented devices as well as 'make-do's.' One wonders how often the incorrect assumption that there is little or nothing to find has prevented less adventurous individuals from findings as exciting as those made by Louise Jones and other staff members at the Saskatchewan Western Development Museums.

Made in Saskatchewan's approach to invention should be adopted by other institutions. Instead of the usual hall-of-heroes -- the 'we did it first' syndrome, or the Seven Inventions that Won the West -- invention is seen as part of everyday creative activity in which problems were encountered, identified and dealt with in a variety of ways.

Demonstrating ingenuity and inventiveness, many Saskatchewan inventors have toiled without tangible rewards to improve the conditions of their lives by developing new objects and techniques to solve the problems they encounter. For many farmers and blacksmiths, inventing was an inevitable result of tangling with equipment not suitable for local conditions. (p. 5)

The starting point is not a handful of key inventions but rather the broad areas of agriculture, energy, transportation and home. The preponderance of agriculturally-related patents, approximately one-quarter, and the flurry of activity between 1920 and 1929, almost one-third of the patents issued in the seventy-five years under study, reflect the economic history and structure of the province. Moreover, they show invention as an integral part of the historian's domain. The exhibit and catalogue covered three categories of inventions: patented, manufactured but not patented, and make-do's. The latter are most unusual.

Unpatented inventions that are items and techniques stimulated by the necessity of adapting to particular problems in the rigorous Saskatchewan environment are often called "make-do's". They are distinctive in shape or material and often involve the utilizing of discarded or otherwise useless materials. There is a shared tradition in that the ideas for new tools and equipment are quickly disseminated. Each person may use different materials, but the invention remains essentially the same. (p. 5)

Make-do's are the sort of object which are often regarded as folk art and little or no attention is paid to their functional origins and utility. Their treatment in *Made in Saskatchewan* as historical documents merits greater attention by historians and cultural agencies such as archives, museums and teaching institutions. The rarity of such an approach is a sign of the need for a broader vision of both

history and historical evidence. The strong similarity between the make-do's of the 1930s and the recycling of the 1970s draws a link between two seemingly disparate periods and stimulates further questioning. One is repeatedly drawn back to the basic idea of invention as a product of encounters with everyday problems; it is not the whole story of invention but an important part.

Made in Saskatchewan is a fine piece of work. The short introductory essay by Louise Jones is most admirable, and it would be unfortunate if her work were not continued and made into a monograph at the very least. It is the sort of scholarship which is desperately needed if the history of Canadian technology is to develop as a fruitful creative discipline.

Norman Ball
Public Archives of Canada